

## ARTICLE

## Festivalization and its territories: Spaces, audiences, governance

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## Abstract

This article examines the territorial dynamics shaping the festivalization of culture in France. Moving beyond the traditional focus on the impacts of festivals on their host territories, this investigation explores how local contexts influence both festival audiences and governance. Based on two large-scale surveys—SoFEST! ( $n = 26,002$ ) and CoFEST! ( $n = 1,237$ )—we analyze variations in audience composition, motivations, and attendance patterns across urban and rural settings, as well as the sociological profiles and intentions of festival creators. Findings indicate that, while the social makeup of audiences remains relatively consistent, behaviors and motivations vary significantly across different territorial contexts. Conversely, the identity and trajectories of festival organizers differ more starkly, with urban settings favoring professionalized, artistic-driven initiatives, and rural areas emphasizing social cohesion and territorial promotion. These results challenge homogeneous views of festivalization by highlighting its localized configurations. The study argues for a re-territorialized understanding of cultural policy, recognizing the interplay between social structures, local governance, and cultural practices.

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## 1. Introduction

The “festivalization of culture”<sup>1</sup> is experiencing both qualitative and quantitative growth. It has recently become a subject of research, initially driven by curiosity focused on three characteristics: (i) A historical<sup>2</sup> or monographic<sup>3</sup> logic, (ii) an approach centered on economic<sup>4</sup> and managerial<sup>5</sup> aspects, and (iii) issues related to tourism and attraction.<sup>6</sup> These different dimensions have sometimes been combined with more artistic or aesthetic considerations, as well as geographical factors, in studies on the relationship between festivals and public space.<sup>7</sup> Previous works have shown that the “eventization” (i.e., the practice of using events as a form of cultural offering) of culture has gradually become

a global phenomenon. Festivals, which are now numerous and present in all artistic fields, have abandoned their exceptional status to become a strategic tool for cultural dissemination. Operators attribute qualities to events in terms of media coverage, hybridization of social and cultural practices, and collective emulsion. These qualities have been placed at the center of the public agenda. Debate has also developed on the impact of this festivalization on citizens' relationships with culture. While cultural policies are still mainly oriented toward permanence, learning, and the primacy of supply, festivals are more in line, even critically, with presentism,<sup>8</sup> eclecticism, and horizontal socialization, interactions between siblings or peers.<sup>9</sup>

The end of the festival exception means that festivals are now confronted with global social issues. Among these issues is the interaction between festivals and the territories where they take place. This interaction is often perceived through the prism of the territorial impacts of festivals. The aim of this paper, on the contrary, is to analyze, in the French case, to what extent local contexts shape the festivalization of culture, addressing two main questions. First, how do territories affect the sociology of festival audiences? Second, how do territories shape the type of governance and logic of festival creation? In the following paragraphs, we first discuss the literature on the links between territory and cultural institutions, and more specifically, festivals. We then provide insights on the local dimension of festivalization in France. In the following sections of the article, we present our results, based on two questionnaire surveys administered to a sample of French festivals and their audiences. We finally discuss our results, showing that the local dimension of festivalization affects the way festivals are created more than the audiences they reach.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Territories and cultural institutions

Artistic and cultural institutions are closely tied to the territorial dynamics in which they operate; their missions, formats, governance, and audiences are shaped by the social, political, and geographical characteristics of the places they inhabit. Whether in large cities, medium-sized towns, rural areas, or on islands, each spatial configuration presents both structural constraints (access to resources, audience appeal, and mobility networks) and specific opportunities in terms of programming, community roots, and cooperation. In this article, we employ the concept of configuration in Elias's sense,<sup>10</sup> referring to networks of interdependencies that, in the specific case of festivals, link creators, publics, and governance structures within their territories.

In globalized cities, cultural institutions are often entangled in symbolic competition and international attractiveness, prompting them to adopt standards of visibility, professionalization, and cultural branding that favor format standardization and a firm reliance on public or private funding.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, in peri-urban, rural, or island contexts, they face challenges of accessibility, funding, and audience retention, but sometimes benefit from a more organic relationship with the local fabric, favoring participatory, contextual, or experiential practices.<sup>12</sup> The nature of the territory also serves as an identity filter, as available heritage resources, collective memories, and local political trajectories shape the narratives that institutions construct, the values they promote, and the aesthetics they legitimize.<sup>13</sup> In short, cultural institutions are not simply artistic "containers," but deeply territorialized actors, forced to adapt their organizational and symbolic models to environments with heterogeneous properties—whether in terms of population density, connectivity, governance regime, or available cultural capital.<sup>14</sup> Thinking about institutions through a territorial lens thus means shifting the focus from their artistic mission alone to the geographical and political conditions of their cultural action.

In peri-urban areas, often referred to as "intermediate territories," cultural actors face a double tension: on the one hand, the relative proximity of the metropolitan regions, which exerts an attraction and encourages the relocation of practices; on the other hand, the fragmentation of audiences, a lack of cultural image, and weak symbolic recognition. These territories, sometimes perceived as "lacking in quality," struggle to build their own artistic identity and suffer from an unevenly distributed institutional offering. The sociological structure of the creative field also reflects these territorial disparities: careers are more linear and specialized in metropolitan areas, while in rural or intermediate regions, they are often discontinuous, multi-faceted, or linked to local social and political commitments.

### 2.2. The local dimension of the festivalization of culture through the impact of festivals on territories and the influence of territories on festivals

For nearly 40 years, festivals have become key actors in the cultural field in Europe and abroad. Their growing number has prompted several analyses of the festivalization of culture. In many ways, the festivalization of culture raises new questions about the link between territories and cultural institutions. First, because the festivalization of culture refers to the idea of the growth of festivals as a unique model of cultural provision. Indeed, festivals are now developing in a variety of territories, from large cities

to the most rural areas. Second, beyond this aspect, among the specific features of the festival form, we can cite the trivialization of cultural production as one element among others within events where partying, sociability, food, and shopping play a primary role.<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, modern festivals are not so far removed from traditional festivals, in which Durkheim saw a form of collective effervescence.<sup>16</sup> Several studies have emphasized the ritual dimension of festivals as places for socializing and expressing cultural identities and lifestyles.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, festivals have been recognized and used as instruments of cultural policy to defend and promote local identities.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the territorial question is a key angle for analyzing festivals. However, previous works have mainly focused on the impact and dynamics that festivals can generate within territories. The literature on cultural festivals has gradually been enriched by analyses that no longer consider these events solely as artistic or festive objects, but as primary actors of the territorial fabric. In this sense, festivals are now viewed as tools for activating territories, capable of generating localized forms of visibility, cohesion, economic development, or symbolic reinvention.<sup>19</sup> They play a structuring role in the narrative of places, contribute to the requalification of specific peripheral or rural spaces,<sup>20</sup> and even contribute to the redefinition of cultural centralities in contexts of decline or post-industrial recomposition. Jaeger and Mykletun<sup>21</sup> demonstrate how festivals can play a central role in fostering a sense of territorial belonging by strengthening social ties among participants and promoting a shared identity, often situated between tradition and modernity. Through a qualitative study of local Norwegian festivals, they highlight how festival participants mobilize symbols, narratives, and collective practices to situate themselves within a community, in a context of increasing cultural globalization. The festival becomes a ritual space and time in which identities can be affirmed, renewed, or negotiated, both for residents and visitors. González-Reverté,<sup>22</sup> meanwhile, offers contemporary empirical insights by focusing on heritage festivals in both urban and rural contexts. He analyzes how festival organizers mobilize space not only as a backdrop, but as a tool for “spatial empowerment” and political expression. Through their scenographic, discursive, and organizational choices, they participate in the production of localized identity discourses that seek to assert a collective memory, combat forms of territorial marginalization, or promote symbolic autonomy. However, this territorializing action of festivals does not unfold uniformly: it is conditioned by physical geography, infrastructure, institutional legacies, local governance regimes, and the imaginaries already associated with the space in question.<sup>23</sup> From this perspective, the territory is not merely a support but an actor that, in

turn, shapes the form, identity, and trajectory of the festival. Some festivals thus take on a role as “catalysts” for development. In contrast, others are quickly integrated into strategies of territorial marketing, selective heritage preservation, or tourist eventization, at the risk of losing their cultural autonomy.

While the festivalization of culture has been the subject of extensive research, studies focusing on the dynamics of festival creation are relatively rare. The aim of this article is therefore: to situate these creation dynamics within their spatial contexts, to understand the extent to which territories shape the profiles of festival creators, their team members, their resources, and their motivations for developing this type of event. We answer this question by analyzing the festivalization of culture in France.

### 2.3. Festivalization in France

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France had around 2,000 festivals. Our recent and first national mapping of the phenomenon lists nearly 7,300,<sup>24</sup> which distinguish three territorial levels: almost one-third of festivals (32%) take place in large urban centers and thus embody the dynamics of the metropolization of festivals over the last three decades; nearly one-fifth take place in intermediate urban areas (19%), while small towns (9%) and urban belts (5%) are less often the location of festivals; finally, the remaining festivals take place in rural areas. Overall, more than two-thirds of festivals take place in a relatively dense urban setting.

The festivalization of culture is primarily a reflection of the phenomenon's expansion, with a considerable increase in events between the beginning of the Lang decade in the early 1980s and the present day.<sup>25</sup> From 1982 onwards, the Ministry of Culture, under Jack Lang's first term of office, took proactive steps to make culture a popular celebration. This impetus, which began with the first *Fête de la Musique* (The Festival of Music) on June 21, 1982, led to a proliferation of festive cultural events. Some were organized directly by the public authorities, such as *La Fête de la Musique*, *Les Journées du Patrimoine* (Heritage Days), and *Les Arts au Soleil* (The Arts in the Sun). Other festivals, the overwhelming majority, were supported by increasing subsidies. While several historic festivals existed well before this decade, the phenomenon has grown rapidly, with a broadening of aesthetics in music (*Jazz à Vienne* [Jazz in Vienne], created in 1981), live performance (*Chalon dans la rue* [Chalon in the Street], dedicated to street arts, founded in 1987), and the visual arts. Today, of the 7,300 festivals listed that took place in 2019, nearly half were created in the last decade. This strong resurgence of the festival phenomenon (Figure 1) warrants examination in phases, with all relevant facts on the table.

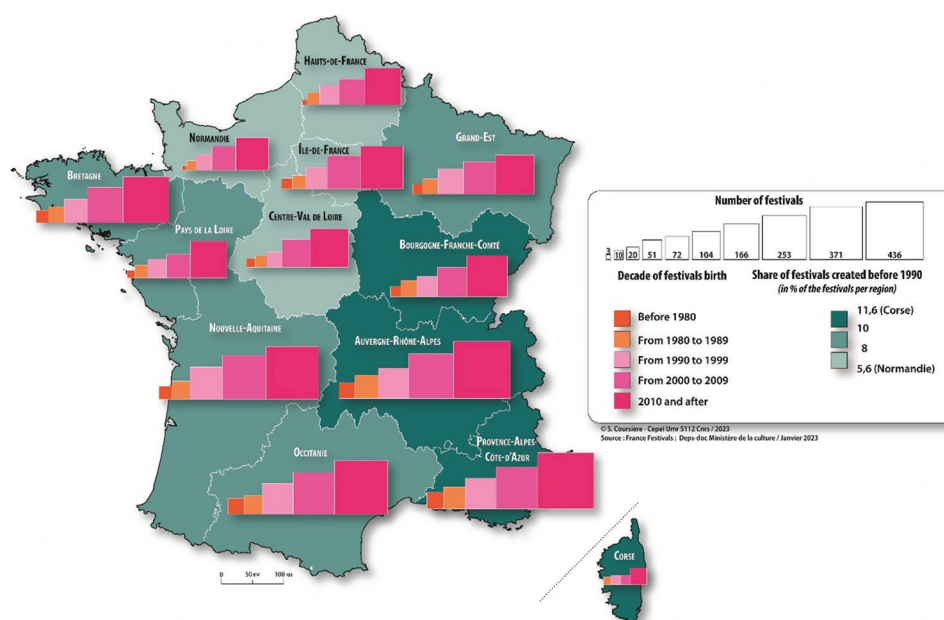


Figure 1. Festivals' creation by decade. Reprinted with permission from S. Coursière, CNRS UMR 5112. Copyright © 2023 S. Coursière.

Festivals created before 1980 were often the result of ventures identified with individual creators and projects that relied little on public policy, such as the Avignon Festival created in 1947 by Jean Vilar. Their location, therefore, varies from rural to urban, depending on the geographical roots of the festival creators. We can identify cities (e.g., Avignon, Paris, Aix-en-Provence, and Orange), but also more rural areas (Prades, Sylvanès, Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, and Marciac) that owe their unique motivation to an artist, an emblematic location, or a cultural operator linking a unique project to broader interests (artistic, cultural, and political).

The 1980s marked the first stage of festivalization, characterized by a significant increase in the number of active festivals created during this decade compared to the previous period. The first decentralization laws of 1982 and 1983 helped to give autonomy to local authorities, some of which decided to implement ambitious cultural policies. The 1990s saw the festival dynamic continue, with the number of festivals created during this period almost always higher than in the two previous periods. The festivalization trend spread well beyond the pioneering regions where festivals had historically been established, namely the southern areas and Brittany. Following the example of cities such as Montreal and Barcelona, the idea of putting a city on the world map through a continuous stream of events became a cultural policy objective.<sup>26</sup> This period is characterized by strategies to attract visitors through culture and by cultural policies based (at least in part) on festival development. It is essential to note

the rise of contemporary music festivals during a period that was not particularly favorable for cultural funding, which partly explains the relatively modest public support for events that, in the most notable cases (e.g., Vieilles Charrues Festival, *Eurockéennes de Belfort* [The European Rock Festival of Belfort], Jazz in Marciac), would become veritable economic engines, while remaining formally community projects.

After a slowdown in funding in the early 2000s, the last decade has seen a continuation of the growth dynamic, often driven by metropolitan areas and large cities in a context of inter-urban competition. Although this urbanization trend has not prevented the phenomenon from spreading widely beyond urban areas, a certain degree of event specialization has emerged. Cities have recognized that a festival enhances the attractiveness of their region by bringing together a diverse audience seeking to share a festive moment around a unifying event. They have turned them into a regional marketing tool, linking the name of the local authority to that of the festival (*Festival des Arts de Bordeaux* [Bordeaux Arts Festival], Nancy Jazz Festival, *Printemps de Bourges* [Springtime of Bourges], *Eurockéennes de Belfort*, etc.).

The proliferation of festivals, particularly in cities, is also linked to the expansion of the disciplines involved in the events industry. Historically linked to music and live performance,<sup>27</sup> festivals have gradually expanded into other cultural disciplines, including cinema and audiovisual arts, visual arts, books, and literature. Film

festivals, in particular, require venues, which are more numerous and larger in urban areas (Figure 2). In total, eight film and audiovisual festivals take place in urban areas, with nearly half of them located in large urban centers. This also includes seven visual arts festivals, roughly half of which are held in large urban centers: *Visa pour l'image* (Visa for the Image) in Perpignan, *Rencontres de la photographie* (Arles Photography Meetings) in Arles, *Biennale d'art contemporain* (Lyon Contemporary Art Biennale) in Lyon, and the *Biennale internationale de design* (Saint-Étienne International Design Biennale) in Saint-Étienne.

Finally, the extension of the phenomenon beyond the summer season particularly affects cities. Festivals that choose to hold their events outside the summer season are more likely to take place in large urban centers than in rural areas. Pre-season festivals (scheduled before June 21), which account for more than a third of all festivals, and post-season festivals (scheduled after September 5), which account for more than a quarter of all events, are more often located in large urban centers and intermediate urban centers (more than three-quarters of pre- and post-season festivals take place there), while the geographical distribution of summer festivals is more favorable to rural areas (nearly half of seasonal festivals, or 48% of all festivals, take place in rural areas).

The territorial importance of festival development is therefore evident. However, while extensive research has focused on the impact of festivals on geographical and social territories (touristic, economic, and democratic),

limited studies are conducted on the reverse relationship: how and to what extent do territories influence festivals?

This paper proposes to document the relationship between territory and festivalization from a dual sociological perspective. It is based on a comprehensive research program that encompasses the entire phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> In this paper, we will examine the relationship between territories and festivals in two ways. First, we will analyze the specific sociology of festival audiences according to the type of territory. The promise of diversification, thanks to festivals, of the sociology of cultural audiences is frequently made,<sup>29</sup> particularly about young people and the most disadvantaged social groups. However, the promises are rarely fulfilled.<sup>30</sup>

How effective is the impact of territories on festivals, according to the quantitative data we have been able to gather? To what extent does the composition of audiences differ according to the type of territory where the event takes place? Depending on the answer to these questions, we can draw an initial conclusion about the potential for democratization through territorialization revealed by the festivalization of culture. The second way of measuring the impact of territories on festivals is to analyze the dynamics of festival creation. Here, we will examine the profiles of festival creators and their motivations for creating an event. If the phenomenon of festivalization spreads across different territories according to a homogeneous logic, then we should expect to see few differences between the territories where festivals are held. In contrast, if we identify

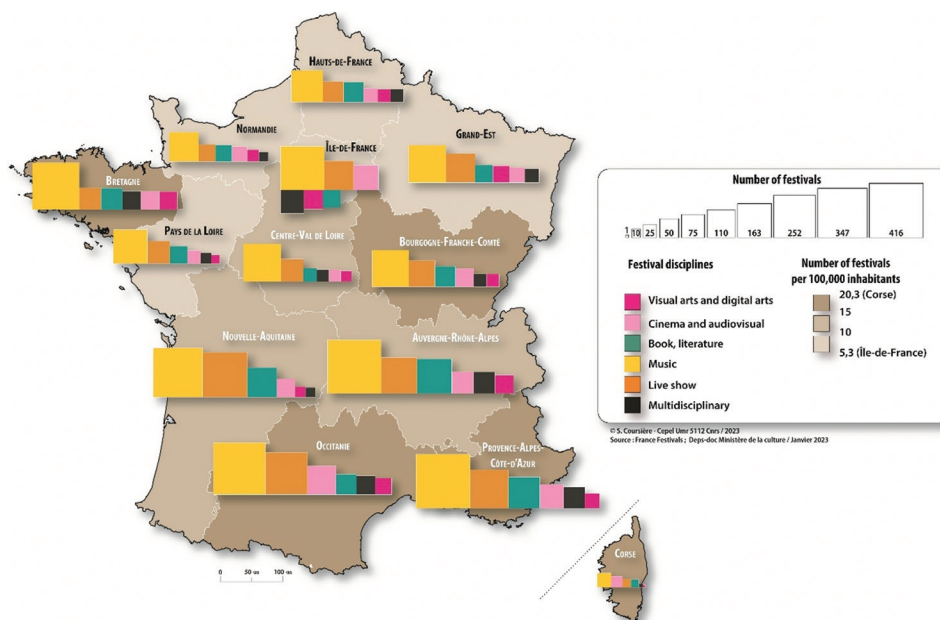


Figure 2. Festivals' disciplines in 2019. Reprinted with permission from S. Coursière, CNRS UMR 5112. Copyright © 2023 S. Coursière.

significant contrasts, a second influence of territories on the conditions for cultural development in France will then be revealed.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Data collection

The data of festival audiences were collected from the SoFEST! research conducted between 2019 and 2020, during which we surveyed 26,002 spectators at 92 music, dance, theater, and circus festivals using a questionnaire. This survey was conducted directly in the field among festival participants by distributing questionnaires at the entrance to the events. The questionnaire consisted of three sections, which were analyzed in this paper about the festival's location, the length of time festival audiences have been attending the festival, their motivations for doing so, the social circumstances surrounding their attendance, and the sociological identity of festival audiences.

The data on governance concerns the identity of the festival creators and the motivations that led to the establishment of the festival. The data was collected from the CoFEST! survey, which began in 2022. It uses quantitative data collected through a questionnaire survey of 7,217 festivals listed in France. The survey was conducted online from February to June 2023 by sending emails to festival creators or, when this was not possible, to festival directors in mainland France and overseas territories. A total of 1,308 festivals responded at least partially, representing a response rate of 19.1%, which is acceptable given the characteristics of the survey and the target population, as well as its size.<sup>31</sup> To ensure the quality of the statistical processing of these 1,308 responses, incomplete responses regarding the section on festival creation were discarded. Ultimately, the sample comprised 1,237 respondents, with roughly equal numbers of creators ( $n = 688$ ; 56%) and directors ( $n = 549$ ; 44%). To estimate the representativeness of this sample and its potential biases, it can be compared to the 7,217 festivals listed in the festival map.

This comparison utilizes three variables present in both databases: the dominant discipline, the decade of creation, and the seasonality of the festivals. It reveals that the differences between the two databases are minimal, although statistically significant (Table 1).  $\chi^2$  tests show that, in terms of the dominant disciplines of the festivals, the CoFEST! shows a slight over-representation of film and audiovisual festivals (14% of the sample, compared to 10% in the mapping database) and a comparable under-representation of music festivals (43% compared to 47%). The observed differences are also minor in terms

**Table 1. Comparison of cartography and CoFEST! databases**

| Variables               | Cartography | CoFEST!  |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------|
| Dominant discipline (%) |             |          |
| Visual and digital arts | 409 (6)     | 34 (4)   |
| Cinema                  | 682 (10)    | 120 (14) |
| Literature              | 886 (13)    | 128 (15) |
| Music                   | 3 205 (47)  | 368 (43) |
| Performing arts         | 1 637 (24)  | 205 (24) |
| Total number            | 6 819       | 855      |
| Seasonality (%)         |             |          |
| Early season            | 2 526 (35)  | 443 (38) |
| On season               | 2 742 (38)  | 385 (33) |
| After season            | 1 949 (27)  | 350 (30) |
| Total number            | 7 217       | 1 167    |
| Creation decade (%)     |             |          |
| Before 1980             | 207 (3)     | 29 (3)   |
| From 1980 to 1989       | 415 (6)     | 66 (7)   |
| From 1990 to 1999       | 968 (14)    | 142 (15) |
| From 2000 to 2009       | 1 935 (28)  | 274 (29) |
| After 2010              | 3 387 (49)  | 435 (46) |
| Total number            | 6 912       | 946      |

of seasonality, with an overrepresentation of early-season festivals (January to June) in the CoFEST! database (38% compared to 35%) and an underrepresentation (33% compared to 35%) of seasonal festivals (from June 21 to September 5). Finally, in terms of the decade in which they were created, the proportion of events created after 2010 is lower in the CoFEST! database than in the mapping database (46% vs. 49%).

While these differences must be noted for accuracy, the structures of the two databases are very similar, allowing us to conclude that the empirical sample compiled during the CoFEST! survey provides a reliable sociological representation of the festival scene in France in 2023.

#### 3.2. Measurements

Territorial configuration is operationalized through a series of indicators that capture the characteristics of territory, audiences, and creators, shedding light on specific festival governance logics across different spatial contexts.

##### 3.2.1. Territory

The identification of different types of territory consists of applying the categorization of municipal densities proposed by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies to the location of the event. This enables the distinction between urban and rural municipalities

based on the population concentration within them.<sup>32</sup> This zoning is harmonized at the European level. The definition of major urban centers corresponds to European cities. It refers to municipalities where at least half of the population resides in a dense urban cluster of more than 1,500 inhabitants per square kilometer. Intermediate-density municipalities and rural municipalities are subdivided into three categories: intermediate urban centers, urban suburbs, and small towns; rural villages, rural with scattered settlements, and rural with highly dispersed settlements.

### 3.2.2. Profile of festival audiences

Festival audiences were assessed using a series of three indicators: Sociological profile of festival audiences, their motivations, and the support they receive in attending the festival. The typology of motivations was developed using Principal Component Analysis based on a Likert variable constructed from a question about motivations for attending the festival. Each profile is built from a statistically significant and recurring aggregation of the various motivations provided by respondents. The construction of profiles is presented in Table A1.

### 3.2.3. Profile of festival creators

To analyze the sociology of festival creators, we have two sets of data: the professional trajectories of festival creators place the responsibility for a festival within a previous professional career. The sociological identity of the managers allows us to examine the contrasts between these managers in terms of gender, age, social category, and level of education, depending on the region.

### 3.2.4. Motivations in festival creation

To analyze the motivation behind creating a festival, we proposed nine categories of motivation to the people we interviewed: promoting an artistic discipline, allowing artists to perform, raising the profile of a region through culture, creating social ties within an area, strengthening a region's cultural offering, promoting the economic development of a region, responding to the demand of a public authority, responding to the demand of a private actor in the commercial sector, or enriching the project of a permanent cultural venue. We then asked respondents to rank these motivations from one to nine in order of importance. The recorded responses allow us to make a twofold assessment. On the one hand, we can determine the proportion of actors citing one or other of the proposed solutions as their primary motivation for creating the event. On the other hand, the relative importance of the categories cited is taken into account,

considering their position in the ranking provided by respondents.<sup>1</sup>

These two elements therefore enable us to examine the motivations of festival creators and their relevance to the dimensions generally associated with the festivalization of culture, such as democratizing access to culture,<sup>33</sup> the need to differentiate cultural offerings in a context of digitization,<sup>34</sup> the desire to combine culture, expression of identities, and socialization, or even to introduce a link between local, national, and even international identities.<sup>35</sup>

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Territories and festival audiences

#### 4.1.1. Territory and audience sociology

While the sociology varies according to the programming of events—younger audiences tend to prefer contemporary music, and older audiences tend to prefer classical music—some major characteristics remain. Three main areas can be identified: the overrepresentation of women, higher education graduates, and managers and professionals in intellectual fields (Table 2). These results align with our existing knowledge of national-level cultural practices since the 1970s.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, festival audiences are mainly local. On average, more than 75% of festivals' audiences live in the region where the festival takes place. The territorial roots of festival attendance, therefore, fully justify an interest in these territorial dynamics. Finally, it is worth noting that all these indicators have remained remarkably stable for at least 13 years.<sup>37</sup>

Once this initial observation has been made, our results point to some significant variations that are worth highlighting. On the one hand, urban areas appear to attract a better-educated audience: large urban centers, small towns, and urban belts have a significantly higher proportion of higher education graduates. It is also in these areas that the proportion of the most advantaged socio-professional categories (managers, higher intellectual professions, liberal professions, etc.) is above average. On the other hand, intermediate and rural areas appear closer to the average in all these respects. It is worth noting the

<sup>1</sup> To do this, we used a points system: the motivation registers cited first were awarded nine points, while those cited last were awarded one point. The average position of each register was then calculated by dividing the sum of the scores awarded to each register by the total number of responses. When this average is close to 9 points, the register is regularly cited as one of the primary sources of motivation by respondents. When it is close to 1 point, the register is regularly cited as a negligible source.

Table 2. Sociological identity of festival audiences by region

| Region                                  | Male (%) | Female* (%) | Primary school (%) | High school (%) | Upper class (%) | Middle class (%) | Popular class** (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|----------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Major urban centers                     | 37       | 63          | 11                 | 61              | 64              | 30               | 5                   |
| Intermediate urban centers              | 39       | 61          | 15                 | 50              | 52              | 37               | 11                  |
| Small towns                             | 43       | 57          | 9                  | 61              | 66              | 30               | 4                   |
| Urban suburbs                           | 33       | 67          | 13                 | 62              | 48              | 42               | 9                   |
| Rural villages                          | 42       | 58          | 15                 | 56              | 59              | 35               | 7                   |
| Rural with scattered settlements        | 39       | 61          | 15                 | 53              | 61              | 33               | 5                   |
| Rural with highly dispersed settlements | 38       | 62          | 11                 | 59              | 67              | 30               | 3                   |
| Average                                 | 39%      | 61%         | 13%                | 56%             | 60              | 33%              | 7                   |

Notes: \* $\chi^2=34.1$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $P=0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.037$ ; \*\* $\chi^2=279.0$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $P=0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.061$ ; \*\*\* $\chi^2=298.4$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $P=0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.093$ . Data source: Audience survey from SoFEST! research ( $n=26,002$ ).

very emblematic situation of intermediate urban centers, which attract more festival audiences from the middle and working classes, in line with the sociological characteristics of their population. Since festivals primarily recruit their audiences from the area where they are located, it is reasonable that their sociology would vary, at least in part, according to their location. Only the audiences of festivals located in rural areas with very scattered housing appear to deviate from this trend. They reflect the characteristics of the audiences of very urban festivals. This raises questions about the nature of these audiences: are these vacation spots or second homes for wealthy people? In any case, while the sociology of festival audiences shows broadly generalizable characteristics, the region seems to influence, at a minimum, the morphology of the audience. This is the first territorial imprint of festivals.

#### 4.1.2. Territory and audience motivations

In terms of the effect of territory on the motivations of festival audiences (Table 3), the motivations for attending a festival are multi-faceted, combining aesthetic dimensions (enjoying the works), social dimensions (sharing an experience with others, socializing), and material dimensions (the festival site, its proximity, etc.). To reflect the various combinations, we have chosen to examine them using a typology. Five types of combinations were examined here: the confident, marked by their loyalty to the festival at which they were interviewed; the aesthetes, drawn exclusively to the artistic dimensions; Friends and party participants, motivated by festivity; the all-rounders, who embrace a comprehensive approach to festival-going; and finally the indifferent, characterized by an apparent detachment from the very concept of a festival. This diversity reflects the excitement and multiple trajectories that festivals generate within them. All of these groups are present across festivals, but their relative

proportions vary depending on the region in which they are located.

Confident festival audiences are more represented in dispersed and highly dispersed rural areas (Table 3). In these areas, where cultural offerings are rare, confidence appears to be a key factor in building a lasting relationship with a facility. Proximity to festival teams and the smaller size of these festivals also reinforce these types of relationships. Conversely, it is in large urban centers that festival audiences are most indifferent to what festivals have to offer. We should view this in part as a form of trivialization of cultural outings, given the density of opportunities available to an audience that is otherwise very familiar with cultural venues. This is also confirmed by the presence, in these same areas, of aesthetes festival audiences for whom encountering the works is central. For the latter, large cities offer a playground without equal. Ultimately, it is in intermediate forms of housing, such as small towns and rural villages, that the challenges of festive and friendly socializing are most substantial. This suggests that attendance at cultural venues remains a crucial factor in fostering and sustaining social connections in these areas.

#### 4.1.3. Territory and accompaniment

To conclude this section on festival audiences, the variable of accompaniment in different territories was examined (Table 4). The results indicate that people rarely go to festivals alone (11%); they are more likely to go with a group of friends (36%), family members (18%), or a partner (39%).

Once again, the territories seem to have a significant influence. While solo outings appear to be more frequent in large urban centers, where there are also more single individuals, group outings (with friends, family, or couples) remain the norm in other areas, particularly in small

**Table 3. Audience motivation profiles by territory**

| Territory                               | Indifferent (%) | All rounders (%) | Friends and party (%) | Aesthetes (%) | Confidants (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Major urban centers                     | 14              | 15               | 26                    | 23            | 21             |
| Intermediate urban centers              | 9               | 21               | 26                    | 20            | 24             |
| Small towns                             | 13              | 14               | 31                    | 21            | 21             |
| Urban suburbs                           | 10              | 10               | 6                     | 50            | 24             |
| Rural villages                          | 10              | 20               | 36                    | 13            | 20             |
| Rural with scattered settlements        | 9               | 20               | 24                    | 20            | 27             |
| Rural with highly dispersed settlements | 15              | 5                | 11                    | 36            | 33             |
| Average                                 | 12              | 18               | 26                    | 21            | 23             |

Notes:  $\chi^2=641.4$ ,  $ddl=24$ ,  $P=0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.1$ .

Data source: Audience survey from SoFEST! research ( $n=26,002$ ).

towns and rural villages. It is in these areas that attending a festival is most often described as a “get-together with friends” (52% in rural villages, 47% in small towns and scattered rural areas). Finally, going out as a couple is the most common way of attending festivals in the most fragmented areas, where social ties are weaker, and this is also likely due to the aging population living there.

## 4.2. Urban areas and festival creation dynamics: a logic of specialization

### 4.2.1. Festival creators' sociology

Interesting differences can be observed between regions. The paths to becoming a festival director vary from one region to another. In large urban centers, the creation of festivals is often a continuation of professional activities. In contrast, less densely populated areas, which also have fewer cultural facilities, are more likely to give rise to the chance development of an activity (professional or otherwise), sometimes very different from the original profession (Table 5). Neither an extension nor a conversion, this situation encompasses the majority of the backgrounds of volunteers (nearly 70%) among festival creators in rural areas. Even in isolated, rural, scattered, and highly dispersed areas, a search for a suitable space to organize a festival that draws on the knowledge, skills, and networks likely to ensure the festival's success. As a result, in these areas, this development logic makes festival creation an event that is more of an extension of existing professional activity. For example, there are twice as many intermittent workers (23% compared to an average of 11%) as in other areas.

These territorial differences also reflect a series of variations that nuance the overall sociological profile of festival directors. Large urban centers tend to favor creators who are young, highly educated, and from privileged

**Table 4. Types of accompaniment by territory**

| Territory                               | With friends (%) | With family (%) | With a partner (%) | Alone (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Major urban centers                     | 37               | 16              | 33                 | 14        |
| Intermediate urban centers              | 36               | 19              | 37                 | 8         |
| Small towns                             | 40               | 14              | 34                 | 12        |
| Urban suburbs                           | 36               | 23              | 34                 | 7         |
| Rural villages                          | 29               | 17              | 39                 | 15        |
| Rural with scattered settlements        | 36               | 21              | 35                 | 8         |
| Rural with highly dispersed settlements | 26               | 16              | 47                 | 11        |
| Average                                 | 36               | 18              | 35                 | 11        |

Notes:  $\chi^2=412.7$ ,  $ddl=18$ ,  $P=0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.071$ .

Data source: Audience survey from SoFEST! research ( $n=26,002$ ).

**Table 5. Career paths of creators by territory (%)**

| Territory                               | Continuation of former activity (%) | Carrer change (%) | No connection with former activity (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Major urban centers                     | 69                                  | 6                 | 25                                     |
| Intermediate urban centers              | 63                                  | 10                | 27                                     |
| Small towns                             | 50                                  | 1                 | 49                                     |
| Urban suburbs                           | 53                                  | 5                 | 42                                     |
| Rural villages                          | 44                                  | 5                 | 51                                     |
| Rural with scattered settlements        | 63                                  | 6                 | 31                                     |
| Rural with highly dispersed settlements | 60                                  | 6                 | 34                                     |
| Average                                 | 59                                  | 6                 | 35                                     |

Data source: CoFEST!/Center for Political and Social Studies of Southern Europe-French National Center for Scientific Research/Depts, Ministry of Culture, 2025.

backgrounds. In contrast, medium-sized urban centers and urban belts offer more opportunities for women from middle-class and working-class backgrounds. The profile of directors based in rural areas illustrates the pattern described above and is distinguished by a higher average age (Table 6).

The regional footprint, therefore, plays a definite role in the sociology of festival creators, but without producing profiles that are radically different from the average. On the other hand, it is the territorial configuration of a festival's location that allows us to understand the trajectories of those who decide to create a festival there. The choice of a territory, even if it is not necessarily part of a conscious approach, is based on specific skills, meaning that a festival is not created in a randomly chosen location.

#### 4.2.2. Motivation of festival creators

Figure 3 illustrates the primary motivations cited by respondents to justify the creation of their festivals, based on their locations. Figure 1 presents the results for the entire sample. We can see a clear distinction between the five most frequently cited motivations and the four others, which were mentioned less often. Respondents highlighted five reasons: Two artistic reasons, promoting an artistic discipline (cited as the primary motivation by 27% of the sample) and allowing artists to perform (12%); and three territorial reasons, promoting the region through culture (23%), building social ties in the region (14%), and strengthening the cultural offering in the region (12%). Conversely, these reasons were rarely highlighted: promoting the economic development of the area (1%), enriching the cultural offering of a permanent venue (5%), requests from public authorities (5%), and the request of a private actor in the commercial sector (0.4%).

A comparison of the motivations cited according to the territory where the festivals are held ( $\chi^2 = 123.5$ ,

$df = 48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) reveals three main findings. First, artistic motivations are more regularly cited by festivals emerging in urban areas. The promotion of an artistic discipline is cited as the primary source of motivation by 34% of festivals in large urban centers, compared with only 20% of festivals in small towns and 15% of festivals in rural areas with very scattered settlements. One way to interpret this result is to view it as a response to urban demand that is more attentive to artistic offerings, although our findings on audiences do not seem to confirm this (Table 3). A second approach is to analyze this result as a consequence of the structure of cultural offerings in urban areas. In urban areas, where cultural offerings are denser than in rural areas, the need to defend an artistic project appears to be a significant criterion when creating an event. Ultimately, this outcome can be attributed to the unique characteristics of urban cultural institutions and is linked to the division of social and cultural labor in large urban centers. Cultural institutions, including festivals, are characterized by a dual specialization: artistic, first of all, due to the high density of supply and demand; and social, secondly, focused more exclusively than elsewhere on the production of cultural goods due to the presence of other institutions focused on different aspects of social life.

This logic of specialization is less pronounced in rural areas. The second result of our analysis shows that 23% of festival creators or directors in rural areas with very dispersed settlements cite the desire to create social ties as the primary motivation for making their event. Statistical tests (paired *t*-tests) show that this justification is more frequently used in the last two categories of community density than in the other five. Once again, this result echoes the distinct characteristics of rural area audiences. Table 3 highlights not only the importance of the collective dimension associated with attending a festival in less densely populated areas but also the importance of trust

**Table 6. Sociology of festival creators by territory**

| Territory                               | Female (%) | <50 years old (%) | 60 years old and more (%) | High school (%) | Upper class (%) | Volunteer (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Major urban centers                     | 37         | 40                | 30                        | 86              | 78              | 36            |
| Intermediate urban centers              | 44         | 31                | 44                        | 80              | 75              | 47            |
| Small towns                             | 31         | 30                | 50                        | 83              | 77              | 54            |
| Urban suburbs                           | 47         | 44                | 22                        | 77              | 73              | 42            |
| Rural villages                          | 28         | 36                | 36                        | 70              | 67              | 67            |
| Rural with scattered settlements        | 40         | 32                | 49                        | 77              | 80              | 62            |
| Rural with highly dispersed settlements | 34         | 41                | 25                        | 71              | 60              | 63            |
| Average                                 | 37         | 36                | 37                        | 76              | 74              | 51            |

Data source: CoFEST!/Center for Political and Social Studies of Southern Europe-French National Center for Scientific Research/Depts, Ministry of Culture, 2025.



**Figure 3.** Motivations associated with the creation of festivals and local density. (A) Total sample. (B) Major urban centers. (C) Intermediate urban centers. (D) Small towns. (E) Urban suburbs. (F) Rural villages. (G) Rural with scattered settlements. (H) Rural with highly dispersed settlements. Note: The color chart represents the percentage of respondents who cited each category as their primary motivation for creating their festival. The height of the bars represents the average position of each category in the order of preference expressed by respondents. For example, in [Figure 3A](#), the motivation “Promote the region through culture” scores 8.17 and is cited as the primary motivation by 23.4% of respondents in the entire sample.  $N = 1,237$ ; festivals in major urban centers = 391; festivals in intermediate urban centers = 202; festivals in small towns = 110; festivals in urban suburbs = 68; festivals in rural villages = 224; festivals in rural areas with scattered settlements = 194; festivals in rural areas with highly dispersed settlements = 48. Image created by the authors. Data source: CoFEST! 2023 survey

in the event. In a rural world marked by both intense social relations and restructuring phenomena, such as demographic decline or renewal,<sup>38</sup> festivals are affected by this social function, especially as places capable of fulfilling it become increasingly scarce.

Finally, the desire to promote the region is more often highlighted in less densely populated areas (31% of festivals in rural towns cite this as their primary motivation) as opposed to large urban centers (11%). It is as if this objective of promoting culture, long pursued by France's major cities,<sup>39</sup> has shifted to areas that are both invisible to the dynamics of urbanization and increasingly popular with urban populations.<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Discussion

Territorial disparities are a recurring topic of public debate<sup>41</sup> and can be understood in terms of several dimensions of economic and social life. Similar to the questions surrounding metropolitan areas, their dynamics, and their ability to offer residents better living conditions and access to services, one may ask whether the observation of festivals can serve to describe this dynamic. The issue of access to cultural offerings—and particularly to festivals—thus provides an intriguing subject for studying festivalization in light of territorial disparities and the diverse lifestyles that accompany them. From this perspective, the prism of festival audiences offers an interesting initial view, insofar as attending a festival, like many cultural practices, is a highly unequal practice marked by strong sociological characteristics that appear relatively immutable to date. Furthermore, as urban sociology has long shown, territorial analysis must guard against any essentialization of the territory's ability to stem these inequalities: spatial proximity does not necessarily eliminate social distances.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, while the relationship between audiences and festivals differs from one territory to another, can one truly posit the existence of sociologically distinct urban and rural audiences? The evidence suggests otherwise. Several factors contradict this bipartite view of festival audiences (Table 2). In terms of the gender indicator, women are in the majority everywhere, whether at seasonal cultural events or venues; their presence is stronger in densely populated areas, and in the most isolated regions (dispersed and highly dispersed rural areas). Despite the sociodemographic structure of the territories, social determinants that predispose people to cultural practices remain strong. The feminization of cultural audiences, long observed at the national level,<sup>43</sup> is also evident in these data. Several other indicators confirm this trend. On the one hand, the level of educational attainment and the majority representation of higher education

graduates, regardless of the type of territory. On the other hand, the distribution of socio-professional categories reveals a clear dominance of the upper classes, managers, and higher intellectual professions across all regions. It has been known for many years that these two indicators are the cornerstone of analyzing inequalities in access to culture.<sup>44</sup> One might therefore have imagined that, depending on the territory, these inequalities would be reduced or accentuated in relation to the characteristics of the resident population. Overall, this is not the case, except for intermediate urban centers and urban suburbs, where the middle and working classes appear to be better represented, and large urban centers, where the overrepresentation of younger people (under 35 years) is more substantial than in other areas.

Nevertheless, there is a clear territorial imprint on festival attendance. Indeed, the strength of the social determinants that influence festival attendance should not obscure the existence of a territorial dynamic, which is a more reliable explanation of the relationship that individuals have with cultural events—and potentially with cultural institutions in general—than the more subtle variations in their sociological profile. This specific relationship with the region provides a more detailed understanding of how a relationship with a festival, and therefore a spectator practice, is developed. Observation of how people accompany others to festivals illustrates this through contrasts in the sociability of festival attendance. These contrasts are linked to the sociodemographic configuration of the territories, including aging, gentrification, and urban relegation. However, it is probably the question of motivations that best reflects the complex social arrangements at play in each territory. It is in urban areas that we find both the strongest forms of indifference toward festivals and those who feel they are enjoying a more complete aesthetic and social experience. This result illustrates the ambiguity of the effects of spatial proximity. Within the same festival, this proximity does not eliminate the need for social distancing. However, it does indicate greater familiarity with the cultural offering. Conversely, in rural areas where cultural offerings are scarce, relationships based on trust, friendship, and celebration become stronger, serving as the primary motivation for festival audiences. The conclusion is therefore twofold. On the one hand, attendance at festivals is influenced by the socio-territorial context in which the festival takes place. But on the other hand, it also depends on social belonging, which governs access to culture, social behavior, and the way different groups respond to this situation. This is why, while it does not abolish social and symbolic boundaries, spatial proximity remains the primary condition for possible social rapprochement.

Table 7. Territorial configurations and festivalization (summary of research findings)

| Territorial context | Audiences                                     | Festival creators                         | Governance logics                        | Resulting configuration                                    |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Large urban centers | Better educated, aesthetes, some indifference | Younger, professionalized, artistic focus | Institutionalized, specialized           | Configuration of artistic professionalization              |
| Intermediate towns  | Middle/working class, socializing             | Mixed profiles, more women, mid-career    | Mixed governance, semi-professional      | Configuration of hybridization                             |
| Rural areas         | Trust, loyalty, conviviality                  | Older, more volunteers, social ties       | Informal, associative, local authorities | Configuration of social cohesion and territorial promotion |

These findings are partly counterintuitive. The hypothesis of a democratization of audiences through the territorialization of festivals assumed that there were significant contrasts in audience identity. However, the differences lie more in their motivation and behavior when going out than in their sociological identity. These initial findings warrant further investigation through two types of research. On the one hand, it would be interesting to address these questions from a comparative perspective, given the heterogeneity of population distribution in terms of urbanization, particularly in Europe, and differences in connectedness to arts and culture across countries. A key issue is whether festivalization abolishes these differences or instead integrates them into its dynamic. On the other hand, the quantitative approach used here does not accurately reflect what motivates and fuels the festival experience. A qualitative approach would enable a more in-depth analysis of the content of this experience, particularly in terms of sociability, well-being, and personal enrichment.

The study of the trajectories and sociology of festival directors should also be discussed. Contrary to our findings regarding audiences, we note that differences are more pronounced in sociological identity than in action. The trajectories that lead to festival management are certainly somewhat different from one region to another, but the differences remain relatively limited. On the other hand, the differences are significant in terms of gender, age, and socio-professional category. In this regard, it is worth noting that the proportion of volunteer directors is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas. This distinction between regions in terms of professional identity is consistent with our findings on the motivations for creating a festival. Motivations closely tied to specialized and professional objectives are more prevalent in large cities compared to rural regions. Conversely, goals that are more broadly focused on territorial and social development are more common in rural areas. These results should be explored further in two ways. First, the quantitative approach we have used here should be combined with a qualitative approach. The analysis of trajectories and motivations typically occurs within

complex territorial configurations. In these contexts, the links between people, partnerships with local authorities, and networks of collusion with artists play a role that cannot be measured using a statistical approach alone. Second, the national framework is another limitation of this study. The study would benefit from an international comparison to identify what most closely links festivals, whether their discipline, their spatial location, or the sociology of their leaders. These remain open questions for further research.

This analysis reveals that the motivations associated with the creation of festivals partially overlap with the dimensions commonly identified in the literature as characteristic of the festivalization of culture. However, it also appears that these motivations are correlated with the territorial variable and are part of specific social contexts that can be highlighted by analyzing festival audiences. The comparison of the results of the CoFEST! survey and the cartographic analysis also raise questions about the transformations of the phenomenon of festivalization, taking into account not only its global trend but also its territorial contingency. Table 7 summarizes our observations and the impact of territorial configurations on festivalization.

These initial findings should be explored in greater depth, particularly by comparing the dynamics of festival creation and their territorial aspects with the more sociological dimensions of the profiles and trajectories of creators.

## 6. Conclusion

Our findings demonstrate a significant influence of territories on festivals, even if this influence does not always manifest in the ways we might expect. While the sociology of audiences varies little from one territory to another, behaviors and motivations are more contrasting between urban and rural areas. The sociology of festival leaders and the study of motivations for creating festivals reveal even more marked differences between these two broad types of spaces. These results lend meaning to the concept of festivalization that was not previously apparent. Although this phenomenon is often analyzed in its entirety, the coherence in the literature demonstrates a particular

territorial contingency. The process of festivalization advances through the specific constraints and resources of territories, and it is experiencing considerable development. Beyond this general observation, our results demonstrate the utility of approaching festivals as configurations, in Elias's sense of networks of interdependencies that link creators, publics, and governance structures within their respective territories. The territorial variable allows us to identify differentiated configurations: in metropolitan contexts, festivals are primarily shaped by logics of artistic specialization and professionalization, while in rural or semi-rural contexts, they are more closely associated with social cohesion and territorial promotion. This meso-level reading helps to move away from binary visions of festivalization (urban versus rural, professional versus amateur) by highlighting more nuanced arrangements between actors, audiences, and territories.

Simultaneously, the study underlines the limits of quantitative approaches. While statistical data have allowed us to identify significant regularities in audience sociology and festival governance, they cannot fully account for the meanings that individuals attach to their practices or for the micro-dynamics of collaboration between creators, local authorities, and communities. Future research should therefore combine large-scale surveys with qualitative approaches that can capture the lived experience of festival participation, the symbolic uses of territory, and the negotiations between stakeholders. Comparative international studies would also enrich the analysis by testing whether the territorial configurations identified here are specific to the French case or whether they resonate with broader European and global trends.

Finally, these findings invite a reconsideration of cultural policy. The persistence of social inequalities in cultural participation suggests that festivalization does not automatically democratize audiences. Yet, the territorial variations we observe highlight that festivals can still play a decisive role in fostering social ties, sustaining local identities, and diversifying governance models—provided that policies acknowledge and support this territorial embeddedness. Encouraging more flexible, place-sensitive forms of cultural policy would allow festivals to remain not only vehicles for artistic dissemination but also laboratories of social and territorial innovation.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare they have no competing interests.

## Author contributions

*Conceptualization:* Julien Audemard, Emmanuel Négrier

*Formal analysis:* All authors

*Investigation:* All authors

*Methodology:* Julien Audemard, Emmanuel Négrier

*Writing—original draft:* Emmanuel Négrier

*Writing—review & editing:* Julien Audemard, Aurélien Djakouane

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institution Review Board of the University of Montpellier. All participants were informed of their rights and gave consent to provide personal information.

## Consent for publication

All participants gave consent for publication of any data, images, or information used in this study.

## Availability of data

Data used in this work is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## Appendix

### Methodological note: Building motivation profiles

The typology of motivations presented in Table 3 was developed using Principal Component Analysis based on a Likert variable constructed from a question about motivations for attending the festival. Each profile is constructed from a statistically significant and recurring aggregation of the different motivations given by respondents. Thus, the “All-rounder” profile brings together individuals who overvalue all of the motivations proposed. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the “Indifferent” profile is characterized by an undervaluation of all of the motivations proposed. These profiles are composed as follows:

### Seven motivation profiles (score/20)

Table A1. Indicators of audiences' profiles

| Motivations             | Indifferent | All rounders | Friends and party | Aesthetes | Confidants | Average |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|---------|
| Artists or artwork      | 13*         | 17**         | 12*               | 18**      | 18**       | 17      |
| Programming confidence  | 4*          | 17**         | 11*               | 14        | 17**       | 14      |
| Festival atmosphere     | 5*          | 19**         | 15**              | 9*        | 16**       | 14      |
| discover new artists    | 5*          | 17**         | 12*               | 10*       | 15**       | 13      |
| Friends, parents        | 12*         | 17**         | 17**              | 5*        | 9*         | 13      |
| Festival renown         | 3*          | 18**         | 10*               | 11*       | 16**       | 13      |
| Festival site, monument | 5*          | 16**         | 10*               | 10*       | 14**       | 12      |
| Partying                | 6*          | 18**         | 15**              | 4*        | 9*         | 11      |
| Proximity to home       | 6*          | 14**         | 10*               | 7*        | 10         | 10      |
| Medias                  | 1*          | 11**         | 4*                | 2*        | 5**        | 5       |
| Social networks         | 1*          | 12**         | 5                 | 1*        | 4*         | 5       |

Notes: \*The corresponding average is significantly lower from the average of the variable (5% risk); \*\*The corresponding average is significantly higher from the average of the variable (5% risk). Data source: Audience survey from SoFEST! research ( $n=26,002$ ).